



National Guard Association of Connecticut

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Testimony in regards to Senate Bills 860, 861, 862 and 863 and House Bills 6405, 6406, 6409, 6410 and 6394

Good morning Senator Maynard, Representative Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Debbi Newton, Legislative Chair and past-president of the National Guard Association of Connecticut and a 29 year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

You have several bills before you today that NGACTION supports, many of which provide clarifications of language in existing statute. Senate Bill 860, An Act Concerning False Representation of Military Status adds the physical display of rank to the list of items made illegal in legislation last year. Senate Bill 863 and House Bill 6405 also clarify language of existing law.

Senate Bill 861, An Act Concerning Retirement from Military Service expands eligibility to enlisted members to apply for the next higher rank upon retirement. Officers have been eligible to do this for many years and can make application to the state to be promoted to the next higher grade, or rank, not to exceed Brigadier General. This bill would allow enlisted people that qualify to apply for state promotion to the next higher grade upon retirement.

House Bill 6406, An Act Concerning the Military Support Program seeks to formalize the relationship between the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department Of Child and Family Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs when providing services to Connecticut Veterans by adding the Department of Veterans Affairs to existing law.

House Bills 6409, An Act Concerning Military Families and 6394, An Act Concerning the Military Family Relief Fund both seek to expand the pool of those eligible to apply for assistance from the Fund.

House Bill 6410, An Act Concerning the use of hand Held Mobile Telephones by members of the Armed Forces while Operating a Motor Vehicle does not give members of the armed services carte blanche to use cell phones and other hand held devices while driving whenever they want to. What it does do is give members of the Armed Forces the flexibility of communications while in an official status. Many times we have emergency

situations where one of us may be driving and have to have communications with headquarters because a situation has changed and we have to go to a different location. This legislation will allow us to be able to communicate with emergency staff on site or in the operations center or the headquarters when necessary.

Two bills that I would like to speak to a bit more are Senate Bill 862, An Act Concerning Members of the National Guard Called to State Active Duty, and House Bill 6408, An Act Concerning Professional Liability Insurance Policies and Members of the National Guard Called to Active Duty.

When a National Guardsman is called to state Active Duty, under current law, most receive their daily military pay plus \$10. For some of our more junior Soldiers and Airmen, that could be as low as 64.99 per day. These could be the same citizens of Connecticut that make \$20 to \$30 per hour at a job as a construction worker. These are the same citizens that may receive only a few hour notice that they are going on State Active Duty and have to spend that time getting ready for duty, traveling to their duty station, telling their civilian employers they have to leave work for a sometimes unspecified amount of time, have to get their families and daycare in order and so on. They do this without question because that is why they choose the National Guard over other military service components. Senate Bill 862 seeks to raise that minimum daily pay to \$125 and to exempt it from the state income tax.

We realize that anything that takes revenue away from the state is not going to be looked upon favorably, but at the same time, we need to make sure that our Soldiers and Airmen that are answering our Governor's call in emergencies are taken care of. Some State Active Duty can be as short as one day, while others have lasted months, such as the airport security, rail security, bridge, nuclear plant and fuel farm security missions. In case such as these, a hardship is created for our Soldiers and Airmen when they leave well-paying civilian sector jobs to go on State Active Duty. Many states pay 200% of the base military pay; others pay as follows:

Iowa, West Virginia and New Jersey pay a minimum of \$100 per day

New Hampshire pays a minimum of \$109 per day

New York pays a minimum of \$125 per day

South Dakota pays a minimum of \$144 per day.

This bill also proposes exempting emergency State Active Duty pay from the state income tax. Imagine being a Soldier or Airman on State Active Duty, making much less in many cases than they do in their civilian jobs, and having some of that money taken back by the state in the form of income taxes. NGACT urges passage of this proposed legislation.

The final bill is House Bill 6408. Two years ago the Connecticut General Assembly passed into law protections of Professional Licenses and teaching credentials for Guardsmen deploying. This year we are asking that you pass similar legislation that would protect Professional Liability Insurance. When CPAs, doctors, nurses, contractors and other professionals contract for liability insurance, they may not know they are being

deployed later on during the life of the policy. What this bill asks is that Soldiers and Airmen be able to contact their insurance carriers within 30 days of being notified that they are deploying and have their premiums and policy suspended for the duration of their deployment since they will not be practicing their civilian profession. The Soldier or Airman would then have to notify their insurance carrier within 30 days of return from deployment that are back will be resuming their practice or business and to have the insurance reinstated. Again, NGACTION urges passage of this bill.

I thank you for your time and all you do for the Guardsmen and Retirees and Veterans of the state of Connecticut. I am available for any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Debbi Newton", enclosed within a large, loopy oval flourish.

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